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COLOR IN WINTER TWIGS

When garden activities have reached their lowest ebb and winter begins to drag, nothing can perk up sagging spirits more quickly than the sight of bright colored twigs glistening in the winter sun. The dogwood and willow clans have the most to offer color-wise, although among other genera such as Alder, Birch, Cotoneaster, Euonymus, Honeysuckle, Kerria, Maple and Rose, to name a few, will be found certain species which also contribute in varying degrees to the beauty of the winter landscape. Most of them are easy to grow, and by pruning, which is necessary to induce the brightest coloring anyway, all but the arborescent types may be kept in proper scale for use in developments of modest proportions.

There is a special vibrancy in the coloring of the familiar red stemmed dogwoods which, because they have been so widely planted, are perhaps the best known shrubs of their class. Different species vary in brilliancy of color, however, with the distinction of having the reddest stems going to the Tatarian Dogwood, *Cornus alba*, tall shrub (to 8 ft.) with winter twigs of dark red. The true Siberian Dogwood, *C. alba sibirica*, under which name the type species "alba" often erroneously masquerades in the trade, displays stems of a distinctive coral red hue not found in other varieties. It is most attractive. Deeper red or reddish purple is characteristic of the branches of two other desirable species, the Red Osier, *Cornus stolonifera*, and Silky Dogwoods, *C. amomum*, both in the same height group. Purplish red stems in a lower growing bush are also to be had in the Kelseydwarf Redosier Dogwood, *Cornus stolonifera* "Kelseydwarf", uniformly mounded pygmy whose maximum height is less than three feet. The Cornel clan includes other color variations, too, the Yellowtwig Dogwood, *Cornus stolonifera flaviramea*, with branches of bright yellow, the Greentwig Dogwood,

Cornus stolonifera nitida, with bark of distinct greenish cast, and the native Gray Dogwood, *Cornus racemosa* (syn. *paniculata*), a colonizing shrub whose branches assume a distinct pinkish lavender haze as winter lengthens. Although all of the above forms are very tolerant of soils it is well to remember that moist planting sites produce the best color and that periodic removal of the older stems will encourage new, brighter growth. Backgrounds can do much to increase effectiveness, too, evergreens being especially suitable for the purpose. Choice of the proper companion plants is also important in exploiting to the fullest the potentialities of the colored twigged materials. Possible combinations are of course numerous, several which have proved pleasing at the Arboretum being Yellowtwig Dogwood and Mountain Ninebark, Yellowtwig Dogwood and European Alder, Yellowtwig Dogwood and Kerria, Kelsey-dwarf Red Osier Dogwood and Kerria, Paper Birch and Siberian Dogwood, Red Maple and Siberian Dogwood and Gray Dogwood and Wild Crab. The latter represents a grouping of more subtle beauty.

Willows, like the Dogwoods also figure prominently in the winter landscape, with the intensity of their coloring increasing with the ascent of sap in the branches. Most familiar is the Golden Weeping Willow, *Salix alba tristis*, a tree of beauty whatever the season. Even in January its pendent stems appear gold in the sun, a mere hint of the more intense color to follow. A natural planting companion is the European Alder, *Alnus glutinosa*, with its catkins of chocolate brown or henna. The Redstem Willow, *Salix alba chermesina*, another tree form has an entirely different branching habit, growing erectly into what eventually becomes a moderately narrow pyramid. The orange red to scarlet coloring its bark assumes makes it one of the showiest of the bright stemmed trees. Another arborescent type, *Salix pentandra*, the shiny leaved Bay Willow, with branches of olive or brownish green presents a more sombre appearance as does the shrubby Hoary Willow, *Salix candida* (syn. *incana*), whose white woolly stems become reddish with age. Many other color variations exist among the willows, only the difficulty of procurement limiting their enjoyment in our landscapes.

The Rose Family is well furnished with twig interest subjects, one of which is the low growing Japanese Kerria, *Kerria japonica*, whose slender stems of brightest green add distinction to so many winter compositions. Enticing as they are to rabbits, however, protection must be provided wherever the latter are a problem. The polished dark red, purple or brownish stems of certain of the Cotoneasters should not be overlooked, either, for while not as brilliant as the Cornels they help in relieving seasonal monotony. The new growth of the Manyflower Cotoneaster, *Cotoneaster multiflora calocarpa*, shows a pronounced purplish



The colorful trunks and branches of River Birch, Tatarian Dogwood and Canoe Birch are pleasingly reflected in the waters of an Arboretum lake.

red cast, whereas the branches of both the fine textured Hupeh Coton-easter, *Cotoneaster hupehensis*, and gracefully arching branched Slender Coton-easter, *Cotoneaster tenuipes*, are brownish. A number of the species roses outrank them in showiness, *Rosa rubrifolia*, the Redleaf Rose and *Rosa virginiana* (syn. *lucida*), the Virginia Rose, both red, and the Prairie Rose, *Rosa setigera*, whose arching canes tend more to dark red-dish purple. One is aware also of the lustrous purplish brown new wood of the prickly Primrose Rose, *Rosa primula*, handsome fine textured shrub of shapely appearance. The Ninebarks, best known for the shaggy character of their exfoliating bark, are useful in the landscape for another reason, the warm tans and browns they contribute to the winter scene. The low growing (to 5 ft.) Mountain Ninebark, *Physocarpus monogynus*, which has already been mentioned is an especially pleasing companion plant for winter compositions. Commonplace though it is, our wild Blackcap Raspberry, *Rubus occidentalis*, assumes a new importance during the dormant season. For then we notice, perhaps for the first time, the decorative possibilities of its reddish canes heavily coated with frosty 'bloom'. Among the arborescent members of the Rose Family the haw-thorns always deserve mention because of their grayness and the picturesque sweep of their intricate branches. So do the crabapples by reason of the roseate hue which becomes diffused through their gray structural framework as soon as the sap begins to rise. Lighter gray is introduced by the multi-trunked Juneberries or Shadblows (*Amelanchier*), graceful small trees whose branches are fitted with smooth gray bark.

Euonymus is another group adding to the winter picture, less spectacularly from a color standpoint but noteworthy texturally. Both the Winged Euonymus, *Euonymus alata* and its compact variety, *E. alata compacta*, add a warming influence because of the light brown or tan winged appendages lining their corky green twigs. Green is even more conspicuous in the runners of the Running Euonymus, *E. obovatus*, native ground cover for shaded areas, in the clinging branches of the semi-evergreen Bigleaf Wintercreeper, *E. Fortunei vegeta*, which doubles as a vine, ground cover or even as a free standing shrub, and in the new growth of the shrubby Midwinter Winterberry Euonymus, *E. Bungeana semipersistens*.

Winter compositions may also call into use other shrubs such as the Blueleaf and Clavey's Dwarf Honeysuckles, *Lonicera korolkowi*, *Lonicera Clavey's Dwarf*, and the Silver Buffalo Berry, *Shepherdia canadensis*, all with silvery twigs, the gray stemmed Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*, European Filbert, *Corylus Avellana*, whose light tan branches already bear well developed catkins and the less common red stemmed Blueberries (*Vaccinium* in variety).

Certain trees also provide a supplemental twig interest, some by reason of the prominence of their new growth; others because of the coloring developing in the older branches. Examples of the first group include the picturesque Sassafras, *Sassafras albidum*, with aromatic twigs of lustrous yellow green, Osage Orange, *Maclura pomifera*, whose thick twigs of olive have a yellowish cast, light gray barked Siberian Elm, *Ulmus pumila*, and the Yellowleaf Speckled Alder, *Alnus incana aurea*, whose branchlets take on a reddish yellow cast as the season progresses. Intermediate between the two groups is the Striped Maple, *Acer pennsylvanicum*, a difficult species in our area known for its prominent green, white striped bark. Such trees as the birches (*Betula*) depend for interest, however, not on recent growth but rather on their chalky white, shaggy orange tan or polished brown trunks and older branches. So, too, do the silvery clad Beech (*Fagus*), both American and European, the smooth, gray American Hornbeam, *Carpinus caroliniana*, greenish white Silver Poplar, *Populus alba*, zig-zag stemmed Sycamore, *Platanus occidentalis*, and some of the gray barked Magnolias. Of the numerous other trees which might have been cited more will be said later.

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